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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 000943

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SUBJECT: MEET THE GOVERNOR-IN-WAITING: ANWAR SAIFULLAH

Classified By: CDA Gerald M. Feierstein, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Pakistan People's Party (PPP) Senator Anwar Saifullah has accepted President Zardari's request that he serve as the new Governor of the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP). Saifullah is ready to take up his duties immediately, but completion of his appointment has been delayed by opposition from Awami National Party (ANP) chief Asfandiyar Wali Khan. Saifullah attributes Asfandiyar's opposition to concerns that Saifullah will undermine ANP Chief Minister Amir Haider Khan Hoti, which Saifullah terms baseless. Although the appointment of governors is the sole prerogative of the President in the Pakistani system, Zardari is reluctant to proceed with Saifullah's nomination in the absence of ANP concurrence. Saifullah requested U.S. (and probably UK) support in urging Asfandiyar to agree. End Summary.

¶2. (C) At a farewell dinner for the outgoing Saudi Ambassador hosted by Frontier grande dame Begum Kulsoom Saifullah, her son Anwar, a PPP Senator from the NWFP, pulled aside the Charge to confirm that he had been approached by President Zardari to take the position of Governor of the NWFP and he had agreed. Finalization of his appointment is being held up, however, by opposition from ANP chief Asfandiyar Wali Khan. Anwar assessed that Asfandiyar's opposition comes, in part, from concern that he didn't want to see the powerful Saifullah family occupying a position of prominence in the Frontier government. But the main cause of Asfandiyar's reluctance to agree to the appointment, according to Anwar, is concern that Anwar will use his position to undermine the ANP Frontier government led by Chief Minister Amir Haider Khan Hoti, who is also Asfandiyar's nephew. Anwar asserted repeatedly that Asfandiyar's concerns are baseless. He has a good relationship with Hoti, he said, and could assure the ANP that, as Governor, he would ensure that Hoti would complete his full five-year tenure as Chief Minister. Indeed, Anwar asserted, the biggest obstacle to Hoti's tenure comes from the interference of his father, former federal Minister Azam Khan Hoti, and his Uncle Asfandiyar. "They won't let him do anything," Anwar complained, "they won't let him work."

¶3. (C) Seeking to explain his decision to accept Zardari's offer (which appears to have caused some friction in the family; brothers Salim and Humayun) both Pakistan Muslim League (PML) stalwarts) told Charge they were unhappy with Anwar's decision) Anwar said that he was motivated by a sense that the Frontier is at a crossroads and that he and people like him must act now to influence the course of affairs or lose the opportunity forever. Vaguely criticizing current Governor Owais Ghani for not traveling to the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) or leaving the governor's

mansion, Anwar said that the Pukhtuns must have regular contact with their leaders if they are asked to follow them. Anwar noted that he has been involved for a long time in the affairs of North and South Waziristan from the family's base in nearby Lakki Marwat. As Governor, Anwar said, he would travel immediately to Waziristan and spend the night to rally the troops and tribals loyal to the government. Anwar noted that a similar hands-on strategy had thus far kept Lakki Marwat from falling into the hands of extremist elements. Anwar declared that he would only continue in office as Governor for as long as he believed that he was making a contribution. Charge took advantage of the opportunity to lay out for Anwar in some detail the U.S. strategy for supporting the federal and provincial governments in the current campaign to clear militants from the area, as well as to build effective law enforcement capacity and to address both immediate humanitarian requirements and long-term development needs. Anwar said that he wants to work closely with us on all of these issues.

14. (C) Turning to the political problem of reconciling the ANP to his appointment, Anwar said that Zardari had made clear that, although he alone has the power to appoint provincial governors, he would prefer not to do so over the opposition of the ANP. (Zardari did tell Anwar that he had appointed Salman Taseer as Governor of the Punjab without consulting the Pakistan Muslim League) Nawaz (PML-N), but that's probably not the model Anwar would like to emulate.) Zardari has asked Anwar to take the lead in gaining ANP acquiescence to his appointment. Anwar is working on the problem, but he asked if the U.S. could also put in a good

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word on his behalf with Asfandiyar. He noted that he had approached the British High Commissioner separately with a similar request.

15. (C) Comment: The Saifullah's political and economic roots in the Frontier go back for decades and three of the five brothers have been involved in elective office throughout their adult lives. (A fourth brother, Javaid, is a leading Frontier businessman.) Anwar's appointment would thus bring to the governor's mansion probably the most prominent, independent political figure to have ever occupied the office. It may be that his very prominence is what the ANP and Asfandiyar Wali find so unsettling about the prospect. Nevertheless, Anwar does offer the possibility of raising considerably the profile of the Governor's office, communicating more effectively with the people, and offering a rallying point for the government, the military, and moderate Frontier and FATA elements.

16. (C) Comment Continued: The pressure to replace Ghani (a Musharraf appointment) has been building since Zardari became President. ANP Senator Afrasiab Khattak told Peshawar PO recently that Azam Khan, a former Chief Secretary of the NWFP, remains the ANP's preferred candidate for Governor. Azam Khan is a well-respected bureaucrat from Charsadda, but he lacks a political background or field experience in the tribal areas. It is also unclear whether he has the right connections to manage the military. Azam Khan would also be less likely to overshadow the provincial ANP leadership. Many in the Peshawar establishment are chattering that ANP has been a "disaster" for governance of the province because of the handling of Swat. There is talk that Asfandiyar Wali Khan's standing has fallen in the province because of the perception that he "ran away" after the suicide attack at his home in Charsadda in October 2008. Some in Peshawar circles have begun to remark on the need for a "strong" Governor. ANP is undoubtedly aware of these comments and is unlikely to accept any assurances from Saifullah that he is not out to upstage Chief Minister Hoti. We will make clear to Asfandiyar Wali Khan that we believe Anwar Saifullah would be a good choice for NWFP Governor, but will take precautions to lessen the prospects of getting in the middle of what could become a nasty fight between PPP and ANP on the selection of the next

Governor.
FEIERSTEIN